

Pastor Abraham Hernandez
Vice President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference
Testimony Regarding the Governor's Budget Proposal on Education
Appropriations Committee Hearing
February 21, 2017

Members of the Appropriations Committee, Sen. Formica, Sen. Osten, Representative Walker and Representative Ziobron, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight. My name is Abraham Hernandez, I am the pastor for the Second Star of David Christian Church in New Haven. I am also the Vice President for the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, which is the largest Latino Christian organization in America. We lead lead millions of Hispanic Born Again Christians from more than 40,000 Evangelical congregations across our great nation.

When I heard that Governor Malloy was seeking to adopt a new school funding formula this legislative session, I was heartened. Every child, no matter their race, zip code or income deserves a quality education. Connecticut's funding formula system is broken and the time to fix it is long overdue. The way we fund our schools now only results in our students with the greatest needs getting left behind. I applaud the Governor for taking such bold steps and for showing leadership when our state and country needs it more than ever.

However, the proposed education budget falls short of a comprehensive fix to the funding formula by failing to include within its calculations English Language Learners. As the pastor of a Spanish-speaking church and the Vice President of the NHCLC, I see first-hand how a language barrier can hinder students' learning abilities. Any changes to a funding formula must include ELL as a significant component in order to take into account our state's growing English Language Learners. Our economy is changing quickly. By 2020, 70 percent of jobs will require some form of higher education. These English Language Learners, just like any other student, need the necessary tools in order to succeed. I urge the members of the General Assembly to strongly consider a formula that captures the needs of districts that are seeing growth in non-English speaking residents and their children.

This budget also leaves schools of choice out of the equation. No school funding formula should treat public school students differently based on the school their family

has chosen for their children to attend. A school funding formula should put kids first. That's what it's about; schools really are for kids.

We cannot wait any longer to get this right. We need to develop a fair and sustainable funding formula that treats all students fairly and that is honest about the changing demographics of students and their learning needs. I encourage you all to adopt a formula that is fair, predictable and sustainable. Now is not the time to settle for what is politically easy or to be myopic about this opportunity as we are not likely to see a chance such as this for another generation.

Thank you for your time.